

Airy G. B.

[150]

M. P. de

35 Padre Secchi

Royal Observatory Greenwich

1859 November 29

My dear Sir

You will perceive, from the statement below, the nature of the difficulties, which I have felt in observing the small planets, and the way in which I am endeavouring to escape from them, by the assistance of observers who use large Equatorials. Can you assist me in this?

The construction of the Meridional Instrument, and the general arrangements in this Observatory, offer great advantages for the meridional observations of the Small Planets; and it has been my wish to maintain these observations with the utmost practicable regularity. This, however, can be done only with the aid of a very approximate ephemeris.

In general, ephemerides of the small planets are not wanting; but their errors are frequently so large as to make it nearly impossible for observers to assure themselves that the object which they see in the meridional telescope is the planet which they are seeking. A great amount of labour is thus wasted. And finally, I have been compelled to lay down as a general rule, that small planets are not to be sought on the meridian, unless we have a pretty accurate knowledge of the error of the ephemeris.

It is much to be wished that information on the magnitude of the error could be furnished to me before the meridional observations commence. As good extrameridional

determinations are usually obtained before meridional instruments can be used, I venture to request that, as soon as you have secured one or two certain observations of a planet, you will have the kindness to communicate to me a comparison of the observed places with the corresponding places in any published ephemeris. This would probably enable me to observe the planet on the meridian through its entire Meridional Apparition.

By following this system, I think that the labours of the two classes of observers (the extrameridional and the meridional) may be lightened, and the observation of the ^{small} planets may be assured.

I am, my dear Sir,

Yours very faithfully,

J. K. K.



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Padre Secchi
Collegio Romano
Roma

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St. Peter's



LONDON
JUN 18
1869

